

Amendment to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-20. (Cancelled)

21. (Previously Presented) A vacuum packaging method comprising the steps of: positioning a bag for sealing which presents an open end and a closed distal end, said open end defined by two adjacent, face-to-face plies and having laterally spaced apart side margins; forming an elongated cut line in said bag through both of said plies and proximal to said open end, said cut line extending only partially across said width leaving an uncut trim section between each end of the cut line and the adjacent side margin; evacuating air from the inside of the bag through said cut line; and sealing said bag across said entire width along a sealing area located between said cut line and said distal end, said cut line being of a length and orientation to define, with adjacent uncut portions of the sealed bag, a handle for carrying of the sealed bag.

22. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21, said forming and sealing steps being carried out by use of a combined cutting blade and heating bar.

23. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, said combined blade and heating bar being coupled to the lid of a vacuum packaging apparatus.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21, said forming step comprising the step of extending a cutting blade against said bag.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24, said extending step comprising the step of inflating an air bladder operatively connected with said cutting blade.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21, said sealing step comprising the step of extending a heating bar against said bag.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21, said cut line being formed as a perforation line which may be fully opened to form said handle.

28. (Currently Amended) A mechanism for use with a vacuum packaging device which seals a bag, the device having a base with a cavity therein and a lid, said bag presenting an open end and a closed distal end, with said open end defined by two adjacent, face-to-face plies and having laterally spaced apart, elongated side margins extending between said open end and said distal end, said mechanism comprising:

a cutting blade having a length substantially less than said bag width and a depth sufficient to cut through both of said plies, said cutting blade oriented with said length thereof extending transversely between and relative to said side margins;

a heating bar; and

an actuator operably coupled with said lid and said cutting blade and heating bar, said actuator operable to extend the cutting blade against said bag to form a cut line in the bag through both of said plies and extending transversely between and relative to said side margins and only partially across the bag width, leaving an uncut trim section between each end of the cut line and the adjacent side margin, said actuator also operable to extend said heating bar against said bag in order to seal the bag across said entire bag width along a sealing area located between said cut line and said distal end,

said cut line formed by the cutting blade being of a length and orientation to define, with adjacent uncut portions of the sealed bag, a handle for carrying of the sealed bag after complete processing of the bag.

29. (Previously Presented) The mechanism of claim 28, said blade and heating bar being a combined unit.

30. (Previously Presented) The mechanism of claim 28, said actuator comprising an air bladder coupled with said lid and operable upon inflation thereof to extend said blade and heating bar.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 28, said cutting blade being designed to form said slit as a perforation line which may be fully opened to form said handle.

32. (Currently Amended) A vacuum packaging device comprising:

a base presenting a cavity;

a lid operably connected with said base and selectively movable between a sealing position against said base and an open position,

said cavity operable to receive therein a bag to be sealed, said bag presenting an open end and a closed distal end, said distal end defined by two adjacent, face-to-face plies and having laterally spaced apart side margins extending between said open end and said distal end;

a cutting blade having a length substantially less than said bag width, said cutting blade oriented with said length thereof extending transversely between and relative to said side margins;

a heating bar; and

an actuator operably coupled with said lid and said cutting blade and heating bar, said actuator operable to extend the cutting blade against said bag to form a cut line in the bag through both of said plies and extending transversely between and relative to said side margins and only partially across the bag width, leaving an uncut trim section between each end of the cut line and the adjacent side margin, said actuator also operable to extend said heating bar against said bag in order to seal the bag across said entire bag width along a sealing area located between said cut line and said distal end,

said cut line formed by the cutting blade being of a length and orientation to define, with adjacent uncut portions of the sealed bag, a handle for carrying of the sealed bag after complete processing of the bag.

33. (Previously Presented) The device of claim 32, said blade and heating bar being a combined unit.

34. (Previously Presented) The device of claim 32, said actuator comprising an air bladder coupled with said lid and operable upon inflation thereof to extend said blade and heating bar.

35. (Previously Presented) The device of claim 32, said cutting blade being designed to form a perforated cut line which may be fully opened to form said handle.

36. (New) A vacuum packaging method comprising the steps of:

positioning a bag for sealing which presents an open end and a closed distal end, said open end defined by two adjacent, face-to-face plies and having laterally spaced apart side margins;

forming an elongated cut line in said bag through both of said plies and proximal to said open end, said cut line extending only partially across said width leaving an uncut trim section between each end of the cut line and the adjacent side margin;

evacuating air from the inside of the bag; and

sealing said bag across said entire width along a sealing area located between said cut line and said distal end,

said cut line being of a length and orientation to define, with adjacent uncut portions of the sealed bag, a handle for carrying of the sealed bag.

37. (New) The method of claim 36, including the step of the evacuating air from the inside of said bag by a step comprising evacuation of the air through said cut line.